held discussions with the Prime Minister. The talks covered bilateral relations, regional and international matters.

Both sides agreed on the need to intensify the excellent relations that exist between the two neighbouring countries, to increase exchanges at various levels including Parliamentary delegations, students and cultural groups and to step up commercial and economic interaction. Border and security-related issues were reviewed. Both sides reiterated their commitment to SAARC in view of the important role it could play in promoting regional cooperation.

(c) No, Sir.

Rationale of Negotiating Kashmir Issue with Pakistan

2506. SHRI PARAG CHALIHA: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government's declared stand on Kashmir is that it is an integral part of India; and

(b) if so, what is the rationale of negotiating Kashmir issue with Pakistan, as announced recently by the Prime Minister?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE): (a) and (b) The State of Jammu & Kashmir is an integral part of the Indian Union. A part of the territory of the State is under the illegal and forcible occupation of Pakistan. India is committed to resolution of all outstanding issues with Pakistan, including its continuing occupation of a part of the territories of the State of J&K, through peaceful means and bilateral discussions.

Border Trade with Bangladesh

2507. SHRI KHAGEN DAS: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is any proposal sent by North-Eastern States for facilitating border trade with Bangladesh;

(b) if so, what steps have been taken by Government in this regard; and

(c) the reaction of Government of Bangladesh to this proposal?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE): (a) Yes Sir.

(b) and (c) At the 5th Indo-Bangladesh Joint Economic Commission (JEC) meeting in March 1997, both sides discussed the question of trade in local produce between areas in India and Bangladesh at selected points contiguous to the border between the two countries and agreed to set up a group of experts to examine and make recommendations on the modalities of border trade.

Meeting of Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan at SAARC Summit

2508. SHRI RAMDAS AGARWAL: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether Indian Prime Minister has expressed the desire to meet his Pakistan counterpart on the side-lines of the SAARC Summit, scheduled to be held in Colombo in July, 1998 and also called upon him to step forward, before the summit meet, for a fruitful and sustained dialogue on a whole array of bilateral issues, including Kashmir as reported in the Hindustan Times dated 23 June, 1998, and

(b) if so, whether Pakistan has agreed to talk in the spirit of the Simla Agreement signed between the two countries in 1972 indicating the date and venue?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE): (a) and (b) Prime Minister wrote to the Prime Minsiter of Pakistan on 14 June, 1998 reiterating India's commitment to fostering a peaceful and friendly relationship, and developing a stable structure of cooperation between India and Pakistan. In his letter, Prime Minister also convey-